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## Curbing Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa's Schools

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### Abstract

Teenage pregnancy in South African schools presents a significant challenge to the education system and society as a whole. This study seeks to investigate the strategies implemented to decrease teenage pregnancy in South African schools. It is based on qualitative secondary sources such as expert analysis, teacher input, civil society, and testimonies from teenagers. The data was collected from public online sources, including audio, YouTube videos, and written testimonies. The findings indicate that teenage pregnancy has reached a crisis point. Socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, peer pressure, cultural and societal norms around sexuality, and related challenges are at the center of child pregnancy in South Africa.

**Keywords:** education, intervention, schools, South Africa, teenage pregnancy

### Introduction

Teenage pregnancy presents a significant global challenge. Despite a gradual decline in the birth rate over the years, the number of adolescent pregnancies in developing countries is rising, reaching millions (Samways, 2019). South Africa is grappling with a crisis of teenage pregnancy, as the WHO reports one of the highest rates in the world. Almost one in four girls in South Africa becomes pregnant before the age of 20 (Mabila et al., 2023). Statistics from South Africa indicate that KwaZulu-Natal has the highest number of pregnancies among girls aged 10 to 17, followed by Limpopo (Risenga & Mboweni, 2022). According to the latest data from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), approximately 150,000 girls between the ages of 10 and 19 became pregnant in the final year of 2022/2023. This marks an increase from the previous year, during which 90,037 pregnancies were reported across all nine

provinces (Kruger et al., 2022). The provinces with the highest rates of teenage pregnancies are the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu-Natal. These areas have higher levels of poverty and limited access to sexual health services, which contributes to the increase in teen pregnancies (Sekopa et al., 2024). Save the Children's news release on August 24, 2021, stated that the number of children born to teenage mothers in Gauteng, the country's most populous province, has increased by 60% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Barron et al., 2022, p. 252). According to the Gauteng Department of Health, more than 23,000 girls aged 19 and under gave birth between April 2020 and March 2021, with 934 under 14. This is compared to 14,577 girls aged 19 and under who had babies in the same period a year earlier (Barron, 2022).

Between 2010 and 2011, approximately 30% of adolescent girls were pregnant, and most of these pregnancies were unplanned (Rangiah, 2012). In the



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same year, 20,000 teenagers were pregnant. The highest numbers of pregnancies were in Gauteng, with over 5,000, and the Eastern Cape, with over 3,000 (Panday, et al., 2009). In 2014, more than 70,000 girls aged 18 and younger gave birth. A parliamentary report showed that 18,357 schoolgirls fell pregnant, and a 2015 report showed that 15,504 schoolgirls gave birth, with 8,732 in 2016 (Ramakatsa, 2020).

Multiple factors contribute to the high rate of teenage pregnancy, both in general and specifically in South African schools. These factors include dysfunctional family structures, lack of parental guidance and supervision, alcohol and drug abuse, peer pressure, history of child abuse, psychological distress, intimate partner violence, poverty, inability to negotiate condom use in age-disparate sexual relationships, poor school performance, and inadequate contraceptive practices (Govender et al., 2020, p. 2; Fodo & Hariram, 2024). Ajay and Ezegbe (2020) also noted that restrictive policies, such as laws regarding the age of consent for contraception services, and limited access to reproductive healthcare services, are contributing factors.

Teenage pregnancy is a significant societal issue because it can lead to negative consequences for teenagers, such as hindering their development, compromising their education and health, and limiting their future employment opportunities (Kassa, 2018). Additionally, teenage pregnancy can have adverse effects on learner attendance, emotional behavior, academic performance, livelihoods, and teenagers' health. Furthermore, it is also associated with poorer child health and nutritional outcomes in the long term (Barron et al., 2022). Early pregnancy and childbearing can have significant social consequences for girls. These consequences include reduced status in the home and community, stigmatization, rejection, and violence by family members, peers, and partners, as well as early marriage (Govender et al., 2020). Early pregnancy is one of the leading causes of death and disability among 15 to 19-year-olds (Barron et al., 2022). Teenage mothers experience psychological stress and face challenges such as loss of trust in their parents, difficulty disclosing the pregnancy to the unborn child's biological father, peer rejection, and isolation from the broader community due to stigma (Govender et al., 2020). Vaamonde, Algar-Santacruz, and Dillard (2022) argue that pregnant teenagers experience significant stress that could negatively impact their physical well-being if not managed. Mwongeli (2022) found that teenagers who lack access to health information have lower functional health and are at higher risk of teenage pregnancy. The study suggests that awareness campaigns and life orientation education can provide valuable information on social issues, including teenage pregnancy. Additionally, the study highlights that schools can serve as a social safety net, protecting teenage girls from exploitation they may face outside of school, and reducing the risk of teenage pregnancy and related health

complications (Mwongeli, 2022, p. 39). It is important to involve young people in designing prevention strategies to ensure that interventions are relevant to their needs and social contexts. Addressing the role of young men in teenage pregnancies by involving them in reproductive health programs and tailoring interventions to address socio-economic disparities, as well as providing support to at-risk teenagers, can help prevent pregnancies that are seen as means to secure financial stability (Sekopa et al., 2024; Madlala, 2018).

In South Africa, the Department of Education (DoE) has implemented measures to address teenage pregnancy. They have revised the public school curriculum to incorporate Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into the Life Skills (LS) and Life Orientation (LO) subjects. This is aimed at preventing misinformation about sex, sexuality, gender, and relationships among learners. However, CSE has faced criticism from the media, schools, and churches, with many suggesting that the lessons are overly sexual and only suitable for private settings (Seboholi, 2023). A study conducted by Maarman-Afrika (2023) among educators at a Western Cape school raised concerns about the emotional experiences of pregnant girls. The educators expressed difficulty in counseling them. Educators can identify the challenges pregnant teenagers face in schools and act as supportive agents to help mitigate some of their educational and social challenges. However, there is a need for educators to receive training on how to deal with teenage pregnancy effectively.

Exploring strategies to address teenage pregnancy in South African schools is the focus of this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adapted social cognitive theory (SCT), also known as "Social Learning Theory" (SLT). This theory is a psychological perspective on human functioning that highlights the crucial role of the social environment in motivation, learning, and self-regulation. According to the theory, human functioning is influenced by three interacting sets of factors: behavioral, environmental, and personal (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Understanding is a crucial aspect of changing behavior since it impacts thoughts and emotions, such as perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, which are thought to drive behavior. According to Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), knowledge must be accompanied by the development of self-regulatory and risk-reduction skills and the belief in one's ability to use them (Bandura, 2004). Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (2004, p.3), "is the cornerstone of human motivation and action." Without the confidence that we can accomplish a specific goal or perform a certain behavior successfully, we will lack the motivation and self-drive to attempt to do so (Walsh, et al., 2015, pp. 611-612).

SCT has helped us understand how individual factors and environmental factors, such as social, economic, and political ones, interact with the behaviors of teenagers

to contribute to teenage pregnancies. This approach has also helped us identify different factors that lead to child pregnancy, and it can be used to unlearn and construct behavior change and other possible interventions to address child pregnancies. This involves reviewing cultural dynamics, political conditions, and environmental factors that influence young people and providing potential interventions based on these insights.

**Methods**

Based on desk research, this study uses qualitative methods to analyze strategies for reducing teenage pregnancy in South African schools. The author gathered and analyzed data from secondary sources, including audio and video materials from YouTube channels, TV news posted online, and various online articles. The available information on examining the extent of teenage pregnancy in schools, strategies to reduce teenage pregnancy, the effectiveness of these strategies, and suggestions for addressing teenage pregnancy includes expert analysis,

perspectives from members of civil society working with youth, schools, and the community, as well as input those who have experience teenage pregnancy and their educators.

The data collection process involved manually searching various social media platforms for relevant sources using keywords such as "teenage pregnancy," "in schools," and "South Africa" for the period from 2020 to the present. The data was gathered in early March 2024 and all were reported in English for presentation. The data was considered rich as it came directly from participant analysis, including experts, members of civil society, schools, community members, teenagers, and educators (refer to Table 1). Direct quotes are used in the presentation of the findings for this reason.

Researchers need to seek the informed consent of the participants whose data is used. Still, there is a lack of consensus regarding the ethical question of whether one must seek informed consent when using data publicly available on social media platforms. Because of these concerns and potential biases, the researcher's well-

**Table 1:**

*YouTube Channels with teenage pregnancy in South African schools. Data as of 30th April 2024*

Platforms	Subscribers	Teenage pregnancy materials	Year	Views	Comments
eNCA	1.59M	<a href="https://youtu.be/m2_VjRZ8EAE?si=n-k6EeGN-eGq5i-wd">https://youtu.be/m2_VjRZ8EAE?si=n-k6EeGN-eGq5i-wd</a>	2024	2.8K	16
DWAFRICAMZAN-SITV	109K	<a href="https://youtu.be/6IBvHYi-9_I">https://youtu.be/6IBvHYi-9_I</a>	2022	12K	2
NEWSROOM	1.87K	<a href="https://youtu.be/qDHJI1pV0?si=67YD1ldfZTbCqBZv">https://youtu.be/qDHJI1pV0?si=67YD1ldfZTbCqBZv</a>	2023	38K	13
	374K	<a href="https://youtu.be/gIdLTw9Tixg?si=yA3fv-fY3w5CQPOgo">https://youtu.be/gIdLTw9Tixg?si=yA3fv-fY3w5CQPOgo</a>	2024	235K	0
SABC NEWS	2.35M	<a href="https://youtu.be/QXvfJiHJ6oQ?si=z-reWYXNxNm6qvQiH">https://youtu.be/QXvfJiHJ6oQ?si=z-reWYXNxNm6qvQiH</a>			2
Newsroom Afrika		<a href="https://youtu.be/cOnyEdHtzAE?si=x-h4W44v0K-Fct0xV">https://youtu.be/cOnyEdHtzAE?si=x-h4W44v0K-Fct0xV</a>	2024	388	5
SABC News	374K	<a href="https://youtu.be/Rf5S3jTAE-g?si=Vc0VkJZyspIhPjI0S">https://youtu.be/Rf5S3jTAE-g?si=Vc0VkJZyspIhPjI0S</a>	2022	1.1K	3
Voice of America	2.35M	<a href="https://youtu.be/FzMgkkgw2aNY?si=kxdeNbtg9rhCii8H">https://youtu.be/FzMgkkgw2aNY?si=kxdeNbtg9rhCii8H</a>	2024	535	12
SABC News	2.39M	<a href="https://youtu.be/LnCZ8dgryJA?si=WAZ-triKQeCNZ4H8x">https://youtu.be/LnCZ8dgryJA?si=WAZ-triKQeCNZ4H8x</a>	2022	4.8K	49
News Central T v	2.35	<a href="https://youtu.be/htl_HGurhz4?si=xlMfKHwoc-WnLwI4">https://youtu.be/htl_HGurhz4?si=xlMfKHwoc-WnLwI4</a>	2023	7.1K	7
SABC News	112K	<a href="https://youtu.be/jlxNlpq-AkAlc6">https://youtu.be/jlxNlpq-AkAlc6</a>	2022	1.2K	7
SABC News	2.35K	<a href="https://youtu.be/OL8GdypZ3D0?si=Ak-70wfalirveTExG">https://youtu.be/OL8GdypZ3D0?si=Ak-70wfalirveTExG</a>	2022	2K	3
SABC News	2.35K	<a href="https://youtu.be/hj6z-Vn16igs?si=3KxXXkj9xq1CAq8">https://youtu.be/hj6z-Vn16igs?si=3KxXXkj9xq1CAq8</a>	2023	347	1
SABC News	2.35M	<a href="https://youtu.be/eNHmmUcrAQ?si=_HqsnLuw-FYNX9blN">https://youtu.be/eNHmmUcrAQ?si=_HqsnLuw-FYNX9blN</a>	2023	1.3K	3
SABC News	2.35M	<a href="https://youtu.be/9lmRGEwb-G7Q?si=-XccVxZOKTjf3ekW">https://youtu.be/9lmRGEwb-G7Q?si=-XccVxZOKTjf3ekW</a>	2024	1K	6
SABC News	2.35M		2023	1.3K	6
SABC News	2.35M		2023	384	3

reasoned judgment was required. Hence each source of information was carefully considered as to whether it was restricted by its producer. However, no restriction was applied to any sources used in this study.

## Results

This section begins by presenting the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, its causes, available strategies, and their effectiveness in reducing it.

### Extent of Teenage Pregnancy in South African Schools

Teenage pregnancy in South African schools is a major concern due to its wide-ranging social, economic, and health implications. The rate of teenage pregnancies has been alarmingly high for several years, and efforts to address the issue have faced numerous challenges. According to statistics from the Department of Basic Education, more than 91,000 learners became pregnant in 2021, with some as young as 10 years old. This was a sharp increase compared to previous years (SABC News, 2023).

According to [Fodo and Hariram \(2024\)](#), there was a rise in the number of young girls delivering babies, with 600 live births in girls aged 10 to 13 years old in 2020. Studies indicate that teenage pregnancy leads to school dropouts, as young mothers often leave school to care their children. This contributes to higher illiteracy rates among women, and the impact of teenage pregnancy on education is profound, affecting not only the pregnant learners but also the broader school environment. It's important to note that pregnant students often face challenges such as absenteeism and fluctuating academic performance, which may lead to potential dropouts ([Mashuhlane, et al., 2023](#)). It's also worth mentioning that the prevalence of teenage pregnancy varies across provinces, with KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and Eastern Cape generally recording some of the highest rates. Urban-rural disparities also contribute to the issue. Rural areas often have higher rates of early pregnancies due to limited access to reproductive health services and education, as well as poverty, which can lead young girls to engage in transactional sex with older men in exchange for financial support. Cultural beliefs, stigmas around contraceptive use, and gender power dynamics also play a role in early pregnancies. Additionally, coercion and sexual abuse are significant factors, with many pregnancies occurring as a result of rape or other forms of gender-based violence. The number of babies delivered by teenagers at the country's public health facilities continues to rise at an alarming rate. A statement from a teenage mum read:

I am 17 years old, became pregnant with a young boy who is 20 years old. We met up through Facebook and we arranged the time to meet in October 2022. I did not see my periods and he advised me to go to the clinic to find out if I was pregnant and the results confirmed the pregnancy. I am now struggling with going to

school, I am thinking about when I have a newborn baby, how I to go back to school, but I am thinking I will be asking whoever is around during the weekdays among my family members to help me so that I can be able to educate myself and build my tomorrow (Girl teenage mum, MZANSI TRENDZ Tv, 2023).

The report by Voice of America, based on interviews with school principals, indicates that while the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported a global decrease in teenage pregnancy rates, South Africa is experiencing an increase. The factors contributing to high teenage pregnancy rates in South Africa include socioeconomic disadvantage in many black communities, poverty, lack of sex education, peer pressure, leadership failure, and the non-involvement of certain stakeholders in addressing teenage pregnancy (Voice of America, 2021).

### Factors Influencing Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa

Factors influencing teenage pregnancy include socioeconomic challenges, lack of sexual education, peer pressure, leadership failure, and poor parenting.

### Social Economic Challenges

Social, economic and poverty were highlighted by most of the participants as contributing and leading factors to the high teenage pregnancy rate. Participants pointed out that many of the rural black communities and some of the urban families do not have much to afford for their children, some girls go out and become vulnerable to men who use material things to attract them, and most of these girls do not have negotiating skills to resist men who are going to address their social and economic challenges. One supporting statement from a teen mum read:

For me, I had the issue of social economic burden and poverty. I lost my mum, who was my inspiration and role model; she was trying to guide me in every situation we may face in the family, and I feel comfortable. When I was 17 years old, I lost her and with issues without full of guidance and the person to inspire me, that is when it all started. I met an older guy who said he loved me and tried to resolve some problems related to finance, I did not have the strength and courage to refuse to sleep with him and have a sexual relationship when he asked me. After the newborn baby, he did not continue to support me and my baby, and I even tried to commit suicide (Girl Teenage, SABC News, 2024).

School principals in Gauteng province reported that the majority of the teenagers who fall pregnant are black girls. The following statement supports the above argument:

When you see the statistics and from my own experiences at school, you find the majority of girls

who fall pregnant are black girls between the ages of 14 to 19. For most of these girls, you find the economic status in their families is critical, then when they do not have much to afford, some of them go out and they become vulnerable to these guys and men who use material things to attract them. Secondly, sex education in schools has been resisted by many parents around the country (School Principal, Voice of America, 2021).

### **Sex education**

About sex education, the arguments centered on the need for comprehensive efforts to address teenage pregnancy, including improving sexual health and reproductive education and collaborating with all stakeholders.

According to the National Health Department, they have implemented family planning and contraceptive education in schools to prevent unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and other sexual health issues (Deputy Health Minister, Newsroom Africa, 2023). The participants supported the argument for sex education for teenagers. They argued that promoting sex education is crucial during pre and early adolescence stages as it provides teens with more information on sexual health and relationships. This, in turn, reduces anxiety and confusion among teenagers and is more likely to delay sexual activity, leading to better educational outcomes and social stability while promoting the sexual health and well-being of teenagers. Teens need to acquire comprehensive sex education as it provides with them accurate information about contraception, reproductive health, and pregnancy prevention (Masemola-Yende & Mataboge, 2015). Participants emphasize that sex education equips teenagers with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make responsible decisions about their sexual health and behavior. This knowledge fosters critical thinking and aids teenagers in navigating complex issues related to sexuality in a safe and supportive environment, thereby helping them reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancies.

Sex education goes beyond just the physical aspects of sex. It also covers topics such as consent, communication, and healthy relationships. Teaching teenagers about these issues helps them develop the skills they need to build respectful, consensual, and mutually satisfying relationships. Without proper education, teenagers may rely on inaccurate information from peers, the media, or the internet. Teenagers or adolescents are in a period of exploration and self-discovery, particularly when it comes to sexuality (Expert 2, Newsroom Africa, 2023). There have been different perspectives on sex education for teenagers, influenced by cultural, religious, and personal beliefs. However, there is a growing recognition of the importance of comprehensive sex education in South Africa due to high rates of teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS prevalence, and other STIs among teenagers. According to the WHO, South Africa has one of the highest rates of

teenage pregnancies in the world, with almost one in four girls and young women becoming pregnant before the age of 20 (Mabila et al, 2023).

Some parents understand and believe that providing accurate and age-appropriate information about sex, relationships, and reproductive health can empower teenagers to make informed decisions and protect themselves. Additionally, organizations, educators, and healthcare professionals in South Africa advocate for comprehensive sex education in schools and communities. Some parents support comprehensive sex education.

For me, I must be naturally free with my daughters to speak on the issue of sex because they will need to know about it and how to protect themselves. However, I also support the idea of schools educating them (Parent, Voice of America Johannesburg, 2021).

Some conservative voices oppose comprehensive sex education due to concerns about moral values and cultural norms. However, there is a growing trend towards greater acceptance and support for sex education as a way to promote adolescent health and well-being in South Africa.

### **Poor Parental Supervision**

The findings indicate that teenage pregnancy is a complex issue influenced by various factors. Poor parental supervision is one contributing factor, as it leads to a lack of guidance and role models for teenagers. Parents should be actively involved in their children's lives, providing support, guidance, and open communication about sexual health and relationships. Additionally, sex education programs in schools can complement parental supervision. Without open communication about sex and responsible behavior, teenagers may not fully understand the consequences of their actions.

Parents are important role models for their children, influencing their attitudes and behaviors. In cases where parental supervision is lacking, teenagers may not have positive examples of healthy relationships and responsible sexual behavior. This can make them more vulnerable to peer pressure and the influence of media representations of sex and relationships.

One parent's statement reads:

I believe parents should take responsibility for the issue of teenage pregnancy. It's alarming to see children as young as 8, 10, and 14 becoming parents themselves. It's our duty as parents to have open and informative conversations with our teenagers about pregnancy. We need to befriend them, educate them about their bodies, and teach them the importance of protecting themselves by abstaining from sex until they are adults and are in a committed relationship. Instead of simply warning them about the consequences of having intercourse, we should educate them about their bodies and how

to protect themselves. Many parents are preoccupied with work and other responsibilities, and they may not have the extra time to guide their children on proper behavior at home, in society, and in their relationships. It's crucial to discuss sexual relationships with our teenage children and make them aware of the potential consequences of engaging in sexual activities at a young age. We need to emphasize to our children how challenging it would be for them to become parents while they are still young. Our words as parents carry weight and can significantly influence our children's behavior (Parent perspective, SABC NEWS, 2023).

### **Leadership Failure**

In South Africa, although there are policies in place to reduce teenage pregnancy, schools often struggle to effectively implement them due to a lack of resources and training. Participants' perspectives indicate that poor leadership in societal institutions and systemic factors can lead to teenagers facing social pressures, cultural norms, and a lack of coordination and collaboration efforts among stakeholders. This, in turn, contributes to an increased risk of teenage pregnancy due to inadequate support and guidance, as well as a disconnection between schools and the broader community. We need dedicated and coordinated leadership at various levels, including government, education, healthcare, community leaders, and parents to tackle these widespread issues. They must work together to establish informed, supportive, and fair educational environments and to implement comprehensive strategies for promoting the health and well-being of teenagers. One statement from a church leader participating in the study reads:

Everything rises and falls on leadership, here I am not only referring to the government but I am referring also to parents, schools, and community leadership.

This teenage pregnancy is a result of leadership that is failing big time (Church Leader, Newsroom Africa, 2021).

The feedback from participants indicates that it is crucial to involve all stakeholders, including teenagers themselves, and empower them to take control of their sexual health and make informed decisions. The statement from the participant supporting the above statements was as follows:

I think there is something we are not doing right. I think we need to go back to the drawing table and come together as South Africans to make this a collective problem and try to address it together. One of the major problems here is that teenagers are not being made part of this conversation. We have not asked them what it is they want; they do have a problem with the use of

contraception. They need information regarding it, and then, in the end, they have to be part of this conversation and take responsibility for what happens to their future and be able to prevent these pregnancies.

In addition to this, there is a need to make all stakeholders, when addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy, by involving educators to create a supportive environment where teenagers feel comfortable discussing these issues. Governments play a significant role in implementing policies and programs aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy rates. Healthcare providers play a critical role in providing access to reproductive healthcare services for teenagers and approaching teenagers with empathy and without judgment. Parents and guardians provide support, guidance, and access to healthcare resources. Community organizations can offer support services and resources, including providing access to healthcare, offering educational and vocational support, and creating safe spaces for teenagers to seek help and advice (President of the College of Medicine, SABC NEWS, 2024).

A parent and church leader participating in this study said:

I hear people blaming parents for not taking enough responsibility to educate their teenage children. But I can see that there is a need for parents and all stakeholders to work together to educate our teenage boys and girls, and to define their roles in the family. We should communicate clearly to our children about their roles, and the same approach should be applied in our communities. We need to come together as a society, with each person playing their role to educate and protect our kids. I believe that by working together, we can make a change and reduce the rate of this pandemic (Parent, Newsroom African, 2021).

The church leader's statement reads:

The government needs to consult with parents before implementing any policies or activities that will affect their children. It's important to establish boundaries between parental responsibility and government assistance, and I believe we can work together on this (Church Leader, Newsroom Africa, 2021).

### **Peer-pressure**

Peer pressure was found to be a contributing factor, as young people felt pressured to engage in substance misuse and sexual activity. Participants believed that when teenagers are intoxicated, their ability to reason decreases,

making them more susceptible to the influence of others and increasing the likelihood of engaging in vulnerable sexual relationships. In such situations, they may lack the strength to negotiate the use of condoms, putting them at risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV (Expert 1, SABC NEWS).

In the interview done with the teenage girl witnessed the above statements:

I fall pregnant with peer-pressure from other friends. We had a party on the weekend where all the students from my class had to meet and celebrate. We celebrated and later everyone hung out with her boyfriend or girlfriend danced and enjoyed after drinking so much alcohol. And one friend we had a sexual counterpart the same day and we did not use condoms. Later, when I realized that, I was pregnant, I wanted to go for an abortion my aunt refused to say that I was having sex without knowing that I would fall pregnant. She said I should have to discipline myself by going outside there partying getting drunk and having sex. Did she expect me to stay home while my friends go partying? (girl teen mum, MZANSI TRENDZ Tv, 2024).

Another statement from a female student:

The increased teenage pregnancy in Mpumalanga district is the factor that we youth you find that we become friends with negative friends that will push us to do something bad. I can say that peer pressure is one of the factors contributing to teenage pregnancy among us. The second thing is poverty, you find most of the time we have sex with older people for them to give us money to satisfy our needs (Girl Teenage, SABC News, 2024).

### **Strategies to Reduce Teenage Pregnancy in Schools**

To address teenage pregnancy, a comprehensive approach is needed that covers social, educational, and healthcare aspects. Current findings suggest that there are strategies available to reduce the increase in teenage pregnancies. For instance, the Basic Education department has introduced a policy for preventing and managing pregnancies. This policy requires schools to report underage pregnancies to the police. As a result, educators will have to inform the police if a pupil under 16 becomes pregnant. In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in pregnancies among school-going girls, with children as young as ten becoming mothers (SABC NEWS, 2021). The findings also show that NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) programs engage men and young boys. One of the participants in the study indicated that he is the manager of an NGO that specifically educates men and young boys on how to be good men. The participant

indicated that this program teaches men and young boys who they are, and what their responsibilities are, and educates the young boys on the effects of becoming young parents. The participants provided some examples on the ground where they have a young boy going through emotional distress because of becoming a father at a young age, who themselves do not know who to talk to. Participant's statement ready:

We have a program that engages boys and men as partners in preventing teenage pregnancy by promoting gender equality, healthy relationships, and responsible fatherhood. This involves programs that encourage positive masculinity, promote mutual respect, and address harmful gender norms and attitudes. Statistics show that adult men are the ones who make pregnant young girls at a high level of rate compared to the rates of young teenage boys who have sexual relationships with young girls. In our programs, we teach older men to be accountable. We have challenges when we talk about comprehensive sex education at schools, we found some governing bodies schools resting such kind of approach to learners at schools then which tells us how much support they can give to those learners if they resist comprehensive sex education in these teenagers' detail explanations about their biological body, how it functions and what they do when it starts to manifest to their body. The same approach can be applied when teenagers go back home. These conversations are still tabus to parents talking to young ones about it, for instance, I was confronted by a man at the shop and he saw the cap was wearing and he managed to know where I work, then, he asked me: why you teach our kids the issue of sex at school and add we do not agree with it as parents. You can see the gap between communities and parents is still huge. The role of communities and other structures is challenging, we need them to come first to support the programs of education that we are implementing that intend to reduce teenage pregnancy in our country. We appreciate other structures outside there that are supportive of the education programs of our young people on this matter (Expert 2, Newsroom Africa, 2024).

The following strategy, which has not been implemented yet, was discussed during an interview with the Health Department at the College of Médecins. A representative of the College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists was quoted in an interview on SABC NEWS.

In our healthcare system, specifically within my College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, we have a program designed to educate young teenagers. This program

provides information about contraceptives, sexuality education, pregnancy safety, and where to access these services. It is essential to ensure that healthcare providers are well-equipped to provide this information thoroughly. Additionally, we need to ensure that healthcare services for youth and adolescents are accessible and effective. It is important to educate parents and religious groups and involve them in conversations about these issues and potential solutions (SABC NEWS, President of College of Medicine, 2024).

The Deputy Health Minister mentioned that they attempted to implement a program in schools focusing on health and sexual education to reduce teenage pregnancy rates. However, in an interview, he revealed that they faced challenges with the school governing bodies.

In the interview with Newsroom Africa, the Health Minister stated:

We have a school health nurses' program that primarily visits primary and secondary schools. They provide education on eye care, dental care, hygiene, and hearing care to help children who may be sitting at the back of the classroom due to vision problems. In addition, we were trying to introduce sexual education in schools, including teaching girls about contraceptive methods. However, we faced opposition from the school governing bodies, who deemed it inappropriate and taboo to have such programs in schools. There is a need for stakeholders and society, including parents, educators, and school governing bodies, to collaborate through multisectoral discussions to address the issue of teenage pregnancy (Deputy Health Minister, Newsroom Africa, 2024).

In this study, another program was introduced to address teenage pregnancy. Child and youth care workers were involved in teaching young girls how to overcome teenage pregnancy.

One participant shared the following statement:

I conduct interviews with child and youth care workers who have programs to educate young girls about preventing teenage pregnancy both in and out of school. I teach them about life skills, including topics such as contraceptives, HIV & AIDS, and teenage pregnancy, to help keep girls in school. (Child and Youth Care Worker, DW Africa, 2022).

### **The Effectiveness of Strategies to Reduce Teenage Pregnancy in Schools**

Addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy in South African schools requires a comprehensive approach and collaboration to tackle the root causes of the issue. The findings reveal that the available programs lack

the full participation of all stakeholders in addressing the issue and implementing strategies in a coordinated and sustained manner. For example, some stakeholders oppose the new policy that requires schools to report underage pregnancies to the police, arguing that children belong to their families, who play a major role in their upbringing, and therefore such matters should not be a policy issue. Another argument from participants is that institutions cannot develop policies for teen pregnancy without consent and participation from parents. In conclusion, it is argued that there is a need for collaboration between schools, government agencies, healthcare providers, and community organizations to address teenage pregnancy effectively.

### **Suggestions through which Teenage Pregnancy in South African Schools can be Addressed**

Addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy requires the involvement of all stakeholders such as Government institutions, parents/guardians, school educators, community organizations, etc in dialogue that better understands the underlying factors contributing to teenage pregnancy in the different communities and regions of South Africa to implement their intervention to address the issue collectively. The following were suggested ways through which teenage pregnancy in South African schools can be addressed effectively:

- Implement comprehensive sex education programs in schools that cover topics such as reproductive health, contraception, STIs, consent, and healthy relationships. These programs should be age-appropriate and culturally sensitive.
- Develop culturally sensitive programs that respect and incorporate local traditions while promoting health and education. This approach helps build trust and acceptance.
- Organize workshops and training to educate parents about sexual health topics and effective communication strategies. In addition to the workshops and training, create platforms for parents to share their concerns and experiences, promoting a supportive community where they can learn from each other. This will help parents feel more confident and informed when discussing these issues with their children.
- Ensure that teenagers have access to contraceptives, including condoms and birth control methods, through school-based health services or youth-friendly clinics. It is crucial to remove barriers to access, such as cost and stigma.
- Training peer educators who can provide accurate information and support to their peers on issues related to sexual health and pregnancy prevention is important. Peer education programs can be effective in promoting positive behaviors and attitudes.



- Encouraging open communication between parents and children about sexuality and reproductive health is also vital. Provide resources and workshops for parents to improve their knowledge and skills in discussing these topics with their children.
- Address the root socio-economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, which lead to high rates of teenage pregnancy. Provide support services and opportunities for vulnerable adolescents, including access to education, healthcare, and economic empowerment programs.
- Strengthen the enforcement of laws and policies related to sexual violence, child marriage, and statutory rape. Ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and that survivors receive appropriate support and services.
- Establish school-based support services, such as counseling and reproductive health clinics, where students can access information, counseling, and referrals to other services as needed.
- It is important to provide adolescents with life skills training, such as communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills, to help them make well-informed choices about their sexual health and future goals.
- Engage community leaders, religious organizations, and other stakeholders in efforts to prevent teenage pregnancy and promote teenage health and well-being. Utilize community resources to create supportive environments for young people.
- Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and programs aimed at preventing teenage pregnancy in schools.
- Ensure evidence-based decision-making and continuously improve relevant strategies.

Based on the recommendations above, it is believed that addressing teenage pregnancy in South African schools can be achieved through collaboration, involvement, and partnerships with all stakeholders. It is important to regularly monitor and evaluate teenage pregnancy prevention programs and interventions to identify what works, what doesn't, and what needs to be done to improve prevention and reduction efforts. This data-driven approach allows for adjustments and improvements over time. Furthermore, by integrating these strategies, tailoring them to specific needs, and incorporating them into a comprehensive and holistic framework, South Africa can make significant progress in preventing and reducing teenage pregnancy and improving the overall well-being of its teenagers.

### Conclusion

The study highlights the critical need for comprehensive sex education programs in South African schools. These programs should provide accurate information about reproductive health, contraception, and healthy

relationships, empowering teenagers to make informed choices about their sexual health. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the influence of socioeconomic factors on teenage pregnancy rates. Interventions addressing poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities for young people are crucial in tackling the root causes of teenage pregnancy.

The study also argues for the creation of supportive environments within schools and communities to prevent teenage pregnancy. This includes providing counseling services, promoting gender equality, and combating stigma and discrimination against pregnant teenagers. Effective strategies for curbing teenage pregnancy require collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, educators, healthcare providers, parents, and community organizations. Multi-sectoral approaches involving all relevant parties are more likely to succeed in addressing this complex issue.

Finally, the study emphasizes the importance of sustained efforts and long-term commitment to reducing teenage pregnancy rates. While progress may be gradual, investing in interventions that prioritize the health and well-being of teenagers is essential for the future of South Africa.

### Declarations

#### Ethical Conduct of Research

This writing follows ethical values.

#### Funding

This research received no specific funding from any agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

#### Consent for publication

Not applicable.

#### Availability of Data


The author gathered and analyzed data from secondary sources, including audio and video materials from YouTube channels, TV news posted online, and various online articles using keywords such as "teenage pregnancy," "in schools," and "South Africa" for the period from 2020 to early March 2024.

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